DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 341 274 FL 020 044

AUTHOR Kalaja, Paula
TITLE Analyzing Service Encounters Cross-Culturally: Methodological Considerations.
PUB DATE 91
NOTE 9p.; In: Communication and Discourse across Cultures and Languages. AFinLa Yearbook 1991; see FL 020 041.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Applied Linguistics; *Business Communication; Communication Skills; Discourse Analysis; Foreign Countries; *Intercultural Communication; Interpersonal Communication

ABSTRACT

Two approaches to analyzing service encounters (instances of face-to-face interaction between a server designated in a particular area and a customer receiving service from the server) are examined. Some linguists view service encounters as business transaction texts. The two approaches are the "top-down" approach, in which linguists make direct observations of service encounters in various stores and focus on transactional speech, and the "bottom-up" approach, in which the focus is on both transactional and interactional speech. Developments in methodologies for each are described. It is concluded that the notions of service encounters have changed, and that having both direct and indirect observations from the same service setting would be helpful. An analysis of letters of complaint could be complemented with an analysis of thank-you notes to the same service company to see what it was that made negotiations in service encounters so successful. Contains 10 references. (LB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED341274

ANALYZING SERVICE ENCOUNTERS CROSS-CULTURALLY: METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Paula Kalaja
University of Jyväskylä

Introduction

Service encounters have been investigated by market researchers as well as by linguists. With a few exceptions, the research on service encounters by market researchers has been *theory-driven*. In other words, market researchers have been constructing models of service production and/or consumption. In contrast, the research on service encounters by linguists has been *data-driven*. In other words, linguists have based their analyses for the most part on actual service encounters, tape-recorded, or observed and written down word for word. However, depending on their definitions of service encounters, linguists have been analyzing service encounters (cross-culturally) using two very different approaches, and so they have been asking and seeking answers to very different questions. The purpose of this paper is to review these two approaches, namely, the *Top-Down Approach* and the *Bottom-Up Approach*[1], their data and methods.

Definitions of service encounters by linguists

Some linguists, more specifically those within the Top-Down Approach (eg. Merritt 1976b, Tsuda 1984, Ventola 1987), have looked upon service encounters as business transaction texts. To quote Merritt, who was the first linguist to suggest service encounters as a unit of linguistic analysis,

> A service encounter is an instance of face-to-face interaction between a server who is 'officially posted' in some service area, that interaction being oriented to the satisfaction of the customer's presumed desire for some service and the server's obligation to provide that service (Merritt 1977:198).

[1] These terms come from Aston 1988b and George 1988.

FL 020 044

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
d. Tomnola
BEST COPY AVAILABLE
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Other linguists, more specifically those within the Bottom-Up Approach (eg. the PIXIs [a group of British and Italian linguists] or Aston 1988c, Kalaja 1989), agree with those within the Top-Down Approach in that service encounters are basically business transactions. To quote Aston, (public) service encounters are encounters

> which appear to be accountable for in terms of direct ... and apparently shared reference to a schema which associates situational features of goals, roles, topic and setting to the discourse patterns of business transactions. These situational features are ... institutionalized in the roles of the customer seeking service and the assistant who aims to provide it in a setting socially set aside for the purpose ... (Aston 1988b:42.)

However, it is only more recently within the Bottom-Up Approach that linguists have come to realize that service encounters are not only settings for negotiating business transactions; they are also settings for negotiating friendly relationships. And so the schema

> provides initial presuppositions and expectations, but ... its instantiation may be modified and renegotiated on a bottom-up basis. This negotiatory process takes place over time, and is not necessarily a consequence of an *a priory* goal, as participants find that needs and opportunities emerge for other activities than simply requesting and providing a particular service. (Aston 1988b:42.)

Over the years, linguists have come to realize some other important points about service encounters, too. These are all summarized in Table 1.

As a list, these realizations seem self-evident. Yet, it has taken linguists some time to realize some of these. For linguists, the first part of Point 1 (that is, service encounters are business transactions) has been evident from the beginning, as is clear from the definitions quoted above. This is also true of Point 2 (that is, service encounters are negotiation processes with successful or unsuccessful outcomes)[2]. The second part of Point 1 (that is, service encounters are settings for negotiating friendly relationships between a customer and a service provider) has been realized only more recently by linguists within the Bottom-Up Approach. This is also true of Points 3 (that is, service encounters are subjective experiences), 4 (that is, judgments on the success or failure of

[2] It took market researchers some time to realize Point 2.

Realizations about SEs	Top-Down Approach (eg. Merritt 1976b, Tsuda 1984*, Ventola 1987)	Bottom-Up Approach The PIXIs Aston 1988c*	Kalaja 1989*
1 SEs are settings for negotiation a) of business transactions and	Yes	Yes	Yes
b) of relationships		Yes	Yes
2 SEs are processes and outcomes	Yes	Yes	Yes
3 SEs are subjective experiences		Yes	Yes
4 Judgments on the success or failure of SEs are made both by Cs and SPs		Yes	Yes[1,2]
5 These judgments are made along two dimensions: transactionally and interactionally		Yes	Yes

Note: *Cross-cultural study
[1]Focus was only on SEs perceived as unsuccessful
[2]Focus was only on judgments made by Cs

Table 1. Realizations about service encounters by linguists (SE stands for service encounter, C for customer, and SP for service provider).

service encounters are made by customers as well as by service providers), and 5 (that is, these judgments are made along two dimensions, namely, transactionally or interactionally).

Research methods and data used by linguists

Within the Top-Down Approach, linguists made *direct observations*: they tape-recorded or observed service encounters in various kinds of stores. As they looked upon service encounters as business transaction texts, their focus was on transactional speech in service encounters (Point 1a in Table 1). More specifically, they sought to describe the overall structure of this kind of texts either in terms of speech acts (Merritt 1976a, 1976b) or some other more abstract units (Tsuda 1984, Ventola 1987).

Also within the Bottom-Up Approach, direct observations were made by the PIXIs (Aston 1988c): they tape-recorded service encounters in book stores in Britain and in Italy. Their focus was not only on transactional speech in service encounters; their focus was also on interactional speech (Points 1a and b and 2 in Table 1). As regards interactional speech, Aston (1988a) made important distinctions between solidary and supportive affect, and also between their strong (personal) and weak (impersonal) forms. *Solidary affect* means the establishment of friendly relationships in service encounters. *Supportive affect*, in contrast, means the maintenance or restoration of friendly relationship after a breakdown in the service delivery system - or to put it linguistically, after a face-threatening act[3].

Unlike other linguists, Kalaja (1989) made *indirect observations*. In other words, she did not tape-record or observe actual service encounters. Instead, her data consisted of self-reports of service encounters experienced as problematic by customers; more specifically, her data consisted of letters of complaint to an airline. Her main focus was on service encounters as subjective experiences (Points 3 through 5 in Table 1) and so she came to analyze service encounters from the perspective of insiders, though one-sidedly, from the perspective of customers only. In other words, she analyzed service encounters perceived by

[3] This term is from Brown and Levinson 1987.

passengers as unsuccessful transactionally and/or interactionally. Of the PIXIs, Vincent Marrelli (1988) had attempted this, too, but, as was pointed out earlier, their data consisted of tape-recordings (of service encounters in book stores).

A comparison of Kalaja's data with an imaginary transcript of the same event clearly shows the strengths and limitations of these two kinds of data. The following is a sample letter from Kalaja's data. It is a letter written by an Englishman and received by the airline in May 1987:

Dear Mr LAST NAME,

Whilst eating my flight luncheon I was surprised to find a stow-away passenger in the form of a very lively 2" worm. Had it not been so lively, I would have mistaken it for a strip of reindeer meat and this letter would not have been necessary.

However, the offending creature (I hope there was only one!) was spotted. This, in itself, was quite a funny incident to recall but the response from the cabin crew member was not.

In order not to offend fellow passengers, including a large party of school children, I sat with the meal hardly eaten until I considered it reasonable to draw the matter to the attention of the hostess.

On doing so the only response was 'Sorry Sir, it must have come out of the salad!' upon which my meal was taken away and not replaced.

In my opinion this was an explanation of from where the worm came out and not really a sympathetic apology.

Whilst I am sure that you will see the funny side of this incident, I do hope that you appreciate that after a very busy week of business this was not the way to round off a trip. I trust you find my comments of value.

Yours sincerely,

5/87/8

From the letter we learn that the Englishman had made a complaint to the flight attendant about a meal of inferior quality. In other words, the two were engaged in a negotiation of repair. Had we been aboard the same plane, we could have tape-recorded this encounter and transcribed it, and we could certainly have learnt this also from the (imaginary) transcript. From the letter we can further infer that the negotiation failed transactionally: the meal was

taken away but it was not replaced. We could possibly have inferred this from the transcript, too. From the transcript it would probably have appeared that the negotiation was, however, successful interactionally: the flight attendant made an attempt at restoring a friendly relationship with the passenger by making an apology, *Sorry Sir, it must have come out of the salad*. But from the letter it certainly appears that the negotiation failed not only transactionally; it failed also interactionally. It seems that the kind of data used by Kalaja is better suited for the analysis of service encounters as subjective experiences (Points 3 through 5 in Table 1), whereas transcripts are better suited for that of actual patterns of discourse (Points 1 and 2 in Table 1).

These developments in methodologies are summarized in Table 2.

	Top-Down Approach	Bottom-Up Approach	
	(eg. Merritt 1976b, Tsuda 1984, Ventola 1987)	The PIXIs Aston 1988c	Kalaja 1989
Method	Direct observations	Direct observations	Indirect observations
Data	Recordings: Stores	Recordings: book-stores	Letters of complaint to an airline
Focus of analysis	Transactional speech: Overall structure	Transactional and interactional speech	Transactional and interactional speech
Perspective of	Outsiders	Outsiders	Insiders: Customers

Table 2. Data and methods used by linguists.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have traced changes not only in the notions of service encounters held by linguists but also in the methodologies used and consequent shifts in focus of the analyses made. Ideally, it would be nice to have both direct and indirect observations from one and the same service setting. Further, an analysis of letters of complaint could be complemented with an analysis of thank you notes to one and the same service company to see what it was that made negotiations in service encounters exceptionally successful.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aston, G. 1988a. Interactional speech in service encounters, in G. Aston (ed.), *Negotiating service: studies in the discourse of bookshop encounters*, Bologna: Editrice.

Aston, G. 1988b. Introduction, in G. Aston (ed.), *Negotiating service: studies in the discourse of bookshop encounters*, Bologna: Editrice.

Brown, P. and S. C. Levinson 1987. *Politeness: some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

George, S. E. 1988. Postscript: discourse descriptions and pedagogic proposals, in G. Aston (ed.), *Negotiating service: studies in the discourse of bookshop encounters*, Bologna: Editrice.

Kalaja, P. 1989. *Service encounters: towards successful negotiations from the perspective of customers*. Ph.D. diss., Georgetown University.

Merritt, M. 1976a. On questions following questions in service encounters, *Language in Society* 5, 315-357.

Merritt, M. 1976b. Resources for saying in service encounters. Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania.

Merritt, M. 1977. The playback: an instance of variation in discourse, in R. W. Fasold and R. W. Shuy (eds.), *Studies in language variation: semantics, syntax, phonology, pragmatics, social situations, ethnographic approaches*, Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press.

Tsuda, A. 1984. *Sales talk in Japan and the United States: an ethnographic analysis of contrastive speech events*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press.

Vincent Marrelli, J. M. 1988. Notes on power and solidarity in bookshops, in G. Aston (ed.), *Negotiating service: studies in the discourse of bookshop encounters*, Bologna: Editrice.